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THE RATIONALITY OF BELIEF IN THE REALITY OF GOD

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Religion deals with the fundamental relations between fact and value. God is defined as a Cosmic Mind that is conserving and creating value. (1) Rational belief in God rests on organized religious experience. The special marks of developed religious experience are spiritual renewal, insight, and moral creativity. On the knowledge side religious experience consists of intuitions. Such intuitions are not infallible, but when organized into a coherent body they give objective truth, especially when correlated with other organized experience. Examples of fundamental religious intuitions. (2) Belief in God is rational because the synthesis of the physical and the human sciences reveals a cosmic trend upward. Relapses, stagnations, and evils regarded as due to limiting conditions which are inherent in the task of realizing values through a process—especially when those values are moral and social. (3) Belief in God as a Cosmic Mind is rational because all reality—from the atom to stellar systems and from the cell to the highest organism—bears to some degree the marks of organization and, so far as this is so, can be regarded as evidencing the working of a Cosmic Mind. On this interpretation belief in God rests primarily on religious experience, but secondarily upon the corroborations furnished by a reasoned synthesis of experience as a whole.

All doubtless will agree that the idea of God is a distinctively religious idea. That is, we all presumably are in accord in considering the idea of God to be one that takes shape in close relation to man's religious life as a whole—as he prays, as in company with others he enters into communion with sacred presences, as he acts under the stimulus of that which arouses in him awe or admiration. In other words, we do not look upon the idea whose rationality we are examining as merely, or primarily, an affair of reason, but rather we recognize it as one that arises spontaneously in the midst of living religious experience, and as one that quickly fades and languishes where religious sentiments and practices cease to

be matters of warm and vital concern. The idea of God, we feel, can be alive and meaningful only where religion is alive, and dies when religion dies.

Now evidently this fact about which we may safely assume agreement is one of much consequence for any consideration of the rationality of believing that God is real. For it means that the rationality of such belief will depend to an important degree upon the access which religion itself gives us to reality. We are thus led at the very outset of our discussion—as the condition of making any headway with it—to the necessity of giving some indication of the field of religion, of the nature of religious experience, and of the consequent meanings for which the idea of God stands.

Here at once, of course, disagreement is likely to set in. Nevertheless this risk of evoking disagreement at the start must be accepted; for a latent disagreement about the presuppositions of an inquiry is much more injurious to the results than an open one—inasmuch as a latent disagreement tends to make the dissatisfied critic reject all the reasonings and results in a lump, whereas a recognized disagreement may be the very thing that will enable said critic to winnow out some wheat from the chaff.

Let us then think of religion as having for its characteristic field the fundamental relations between fact and value. The field of facts as such belongs to science. Men have found that, unless they made the ascertainment of facts a systematic pursuit—and a pursuit at least relatively independent of their other interests—they could not be sure that their facts were genuine, nor could they discover facts anywhere nearly fast enough. So when it is asked: “Can life come from inorganic matter?” or “Has radium curative properties?” or “Did Jesus ever live?” we all agree that the answers should be given by science, since they all are primarily questions of matters of fact. On the other hand the field of values as such belongs to ethics or aesthetics. For in the matter of values

men also have found that they must use systematic and relatively independent methods of inquiry if their values are not to be specious, partisan, tawdry, or commonplace. Thus when we ask: "What is justice?" or "Have we a right to consume our country's natural resources?" or "Is the *Spoon River Anthology* poetry?" we realize that we are asking questions that are not primarily questions of fact, but that should be answered only on the basis of certain standards and experiences of value.

But while the ascertainment of facts and the determination of values need to be relatively distinct enterprises, facts and values are constantly interacting with each other in life. With respect to our standards of value many facts are brutally indifferent, and many more are aggressively and triumphantly hostile; while in view of the established facts many of our most prized values seem hopelessly remote and impotent. But on the other hand there are the substantial achievements of civilization, of art and virtue. These interactions and opposing tendencies are so complexly intermingled in every social group as to present an omnipresent though ever shifting problem—and one that few individuals can altogether escape. The result is that men are very generally impelled to seek for deeper principles of connection between fact and value than their surface experience or their actual achievements present. This quest for some deeper revelation of the good in the real is the religious quest. It is evident when men ask such questions as "Is life worth living?" "Is Jesus a Savior?" "Is there a purpose in the universe?" "How may I wholly serve the kingdom of God on earth?" In proportion as they find themselves gaining positive answers to such questions they become possessed of a living religious experience and certain ripening convictions regarding the fundamental connections between fact and value. On the basis of this conception of the sphere of religion I would offer the following definition of religion in which I quote the happy phrasing of

my colleague, Dr. Hamilton, of Nanking University: "Religion is faith that in its deepest nature the universe is on the side of man's highest aims."¹

Religion is thus at one and the same time an experience of deeper penetration into reality than science or common sense gives and a more sustained and fruitful devotion to value than art or ethics or customary morality gives. This twofold reference is of its very nature, and pertains to all the ideas that arise within it. Religion, then, according to its own understanding of itself, does give men a special and characteristic access to reality. This claim of religion cannot, of course, be withdrawn from the test of having its results compared with the scientific account of reality. Just because religion seeks to supplement science it must not contradict science. Religious experiences of reality are subject always to the twofold testing of comparison with the results of science and those of ethics and art. But so far as religion supplements and unifies the results from these other fields of experience there is no philosophic justification for denying its claim to give access to reality. And this is all the more evident when we realize that religion is only a more persistent treatment of the problems of the relations between facts and values which practical life inevitably sets and for which it will always need the most adequate possible solutions.

¹ It might be objected that the view just presented makes religion exclusively a modern affair, and also that it makes religion equivalent to the philosophy of religion. But the relations and contrasts between fact and value would certainly have been felt, and would have prompted men to religious experience, long before anything like science, or systematic reflection on morals or on beauty developed. On the other hand one of the most important things about this view is that the more science and ethics become developed the more special and definite becomes the field of religion. As for religion being made, by this view, equivalent to the philosophy of religion—it is true that philosophy also concerns itself with the fundamental relations between fact and value, but it does so exclusively by way of intellectual reflection and synthesis whereas religion deals with the problem through the complex reactions of the emotional and practical nature as well. Religion then will precede and follow the philosophical treatment of the problem, or it may largely dispense with such a treatment.

We are now in a position to define the idea of God in relation to the experience from which it springs and which must bear an important part in determining its rationality. The idea of God must be recognized as sharing in the twofold reference which is characteristic of religion. It connotes both reality and value because it denotes some underlying principle of relation between them. This is what William James stressed when he said, in his answers to the Pratt questionnaire, that God meant "a combination of Ideality and (final) efficacy."¹ No supreme personal or social ideal taken simply as such, then, should be regarded as the essence of the idea of God. Nor should a purely metaphysical synthesis of reality be so regarded. The ideal and the real must be taken in conjunction in our thought of God, if it is not to be withdrawn from the field of religion. Of course, within the field defined the idea of God has taken on the most varied shapes and meanings. But only its most developed meanings interest us here. I therefore propose the following definition: God is a Cosmic Mind who is working for the conservation and creation of value, and with whom man may be in relations of conscious communion and co-operation. Of God so conceived it is pertinent to ask: "Does He exist?" Our question then becomes: "Is it rational to believe that there really exists a Cosmic Mind who is conserving and creating value?"

I

My first main point in striving to answer this question is that organized religious experience supports the rationality of believing that God is real. That is, just as by an organized body of scientific experience we come to rational beliefs about nature and history—beliefs that amount to genuine knowledge—so, in so far as our religious experience becomes harmoniously organized, it gives us rational beliefs about God—beliefs which, if they meet our other tests of rationality as well, deserve to be accepted as truth or knowledge.

¹ *Letters*, II, 213.

In order that this point may have its proper force something further must be said as to the nature of religious experience. We thus far have characterized religious experience chiefly by the questions it asks. But in so far as man's religious questions get answered his experience of course takes on a more positive character. If he finds himself in vital relation with a cosmic God who is creating and conserving value, his religious experience will be especially marked by spiritual renewal, insight, and moral creativity. Indeed it is only where results like these are present that the full nature of religious experience is disclosed. Has not inspiration, together with its fruits in spiritual achievement, always been the outstanding mark of great religious personalities and of new religious movements?

Now the knowledge side of religious experience as thus understood we may best describe as consisting of intuitions—new apprehensions of divine realities and fresh discoveries of divine possibilities. And of religious intuitions two main sorts may profitably be distinguished—perceptive intuitions and synthetic intuitions. By a perceptive intuition in the religious life I mean some immediate awareness of a divine presence or of the attitude of divine reality toward men—such as: "The place whereon thou standest is holy ground"; or, "Thou art my Beloved Son." And by a synthetic intuition I mean the apprehension of a totality as having such inner relations as give it divine significance. For example: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you: that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. . . . Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Now these two kinds of intuitions interact with each other, and they both together receive testing by practical life and by critical reflection. Moreover, the gaining of the intuitions, their practical testing and their critical interpretation are

not simply the experiences and activities of individuals but are commonly shared in by groups. Thus a body of religious experience grows up, all of which converges upon the recognition of a real God—a Cosmic Mind working to create and conserve value. The intuitive elements in such experience do not give it any claim to finality as knowledge, but they do supply a body of data which presents itself as a characteristic type of contact with reality, and which, when coherently organized, practically tested, and brought into relation with what we otherwise know about reality, becomes more and more transformed into rational belief, philosophically valid truth, and genuine knowledge of reality.

But in appealing to organized religious experience as evidence of the reality of God, is it to systematic theology that we are appealing? Unfortunately this cannot be the case, for theology has not clearly recognized its task as the securing of coherence between intuitions of reality—intuitions that are also socially shared—and as the synthesizing of its coherent body of intuitions with the organized body of scientific judgments about reality. Nor has theology sufficiently recognized that religious intuitions deal also with the possibilities of reality in the way of values to be achieved no less than with its established structure, and that hence the practical testing of intuitions in moral, social, and artistic experience is no less vital for their vindication than their mutual harmonization. So theology has made its work artificial by appeals to authority which closed inquiry and inhibited thinking, and by seeking to get some blanket agreement between reason and faith which has tended to forestall their actual co-operation. Hence it is that the organization of religious experience which has been actually effective in human society, and which gives rationality to the belief that God is real, has been too largely merely a spontaneous growth, supplemented here and there by the great synthetic intuitions of the few, and has been too little aided by such deliberate co-operative inquiry and criti-

cism as, in the form of physical science, has done so much for our knowledge of nature. Yet in modern liberal theology, from Schleiermacher on, important progress has been made in the task of developing into a coherent body those intuitions of reality and value, in their deeper relations and their fuller possibilities, upon which the rationality of believing in a real God primarily rests.

And this may be remarked in passing: that while a truly philosophical theology has come later and more slowly than modern natural science, certain major religious intuitions have received a more massive verification, by reason of their longer history and their more structural place in civilization, than almost anything in natural science.

But because our theologies cannot be appealed to forthwith as presenting the organized religious experience on which the rationality of believing that God exists finally rests, we need to make the present point somewhat more concrete by noting certain religious intuitions which may hopefully be regarded as forming a coherent body and thus as giving us reality—the more surely so if they can be synthesized with our other major judgments about reality.

First, let me mention two intuitions that belong very closely together—the intuition of personality and the democratic intuition of human equality and human solidarity. Now both of these intuitions are either consciously religious or else they occur in ethics and in science as more or less unconscious borrowings from religion. That personality is an intuition, both perceptive and synthetic, is indicated by the fact that just as personality, or the soul, or the self, has been vanishing from psychology, it has been becoming more and more the presupposition of ethics and of social reconstruction. That personality is an intuition of a religious character is indicated by the recognition of the prophetic personality as the supreme revelation of God; or by the way in which Kant or Dr. Adler is impelled to ground his fundamental

ethical axiom of the worth of the person in a supertemporal spiritual order; or by such a sentence as this from James's *Varieties*: "So long as we deal with the cosmic and the general, we deal only with the symbols of reality, but as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term."¹ Similarly the democratic intuition, seemingly discredited by evolution and anthropology, becomes more and more the moving principle of social change. While its religious character is admirably expressed by Professor Coe, in his chapter on "Religion as Discovery," when he says of our present social idealism: "It knows itself to be more than a subjective preference; it is the fulfilment of a destiny; it is the working out of some cosmic principle through our preferences. Duty is for us not a mere imposition of the mass will upon the individual; it is reality in the large making itself felt in the parts."² And the manner in which the intuition of personality and the democratic intuition enter into the intuition of God is well expressed in the following passage from Höffding: "If we understand by 'God' something that is not only 'outside' us but also is active in all reality and all values—and accordingly precisely in the relation of value to reality, and in the personalities that have experience of this relation—then it is setting up a false dilemma when one says 'either the truth comes from God, or it is worked out by each one of us individually.'"³

But we must be much briefer in noting other fundamental intuitions. There is the intuition of prayer—the awareness of contact and communion with a Greater and Holier Reality than one's self or one's fellows, to which nevertheless we and they belong. There is the intuition of reconciliation—the sense of inward renewal through being drawn back into an unseen spiritual fellowship, and the accompanying apprehension of reconciliation as an indispensable social principle because an actual cosmic principle. There is the truth

¹ P. 498.² *Psychology of Religion*, p. 242.³ *Religionsphilosophie*, p. 281.

intuition—the intuition that truth can be gotten, that our mental powers can be trusted, that the universe “is honest” or has a truth structure, the inward assent to the harmony of careful judgments as that which puts us in possession of reality. (This intuition, again, may be either religious or borrowed from religion.) There is the faith intuition—the conviction that by going deeper we can go farther; that by a more adequate hold—intuitive and intelligent—upon reality ever greater values may be discovered and achieved, that with God all things are possible.

There is, further, the intuition of beauty and harmony—somewhat perverted in Bertrand Russell’s impartial worship “of all that is and happens”—better illustrated in our modern poetry of social feeling, which seeks both to discover and to impart beauty as it penetrates into the inner meaning of our social processes and conflicts. And there is, finally, the intuition of love, which is the synthesis of the other intuitions, and which also is the intuition of God. It is the recognition of an Eternal Principle that is working creatively and redemptively for the fullest development of all persons through their own co-operative fellowship.

This must here suffice as an indication of how religious experience may be interpreted as yielding an organized body of intuitions concerning the deeper relations of reality and value, which have massive personal and social verification, and which therefore render the belief in the reality of God rational.

II

But religious experience, having as its field the deeper connections between reality and value, is bound to take account of the relation between its interpretations of reality and reality as it is presented by science.¹ Accordingly we must go on

¹ Religion, to be sure, has often assumed this relation to be inherently hostile, and so has tried to break down the scientific interpretation or has welcomed some subtle philosophical invalidation of it. But this hostility is no longer possible on the

to a comparison of organized religious experience and the generalized results of science with respect to the resultant interpretations of reality.

My second main point, then, is that the synthesis of our knowledge in the physical and human sciences reveals a progress in things which supports the rationality of believing in a real God. In affirming that progress is revealed by the synthesis of the sciences it is, of course, important to avoid the illusion of progress, the illusion that because things have been coming our way they therefore are moving along the right way. This is an illusion to which favored nations or social groups, or unusually prosperous epochs, are subject. And there are optimistic forms of religion and morals which are particularly liable to this illusion. It is doubtless well for the optimists to be heckled by having it pointed out to them that Aristotle meets the intelligence tests better than anybody since, that Athenian culture has hardly been equaled in succeeding times, that quite primitive agricultural societies possessed more of happiness and wholesome communal life than our modern industrial societies, that the medieval period produced more beauty than has the modern age of the machine, and that the art of war is now more nearly perfect than ever but is far from having reached its maximum.

But on the whole religion, with its sensitiveness to sin and its disposition to unworldliness, has not been especially subject to this illusion of progress. And on the other hand when the hecklers go so far as to try to break up the meeting by denying that there are any facts of progress which give

practical side. Religion cannot aid in creating value and experience the fellowship with God that comes from so doing, without co-operating with science. Indeed, as Stratton says, "the course of events clearly points to a time when disregard of common knowledge and intelligence will seem as repugnant to the religious mind as disregard of common morals" (*Psychology of the Religious Life*, p. 356). But if this be true with respect to the practical bearings of science, the hostility between religion and science on the theoretical side should be abandoned in favor of making as positive a synthesis as possible between the two.

rational support to the hopes of men, then the voice of science speaks with an authority sufficient to silence them. For science, working with its supreme principle of continuity, establishes unmistakable sequences between the caveman and the modern inventor, between the medicine man and Phillips Brooks and Pasteur, between the primitive human pack and the modern free state, between the first picture-writing and the free public library. By none of the tested standards that the philosophy of value has worked out can these sequences be called anything but progress on a great scale. And back of these sequences lie those which trace the development of intelligence and of the instincts which equip man for society, and along with and prior to these are the sequences of biology in general. It is not necessary to claim that all these sequences converge to a single result, nor to deny arrests and relapses, in order to vindicate the idea of progress. It is enough to show that there are continuous sequences from earliest to latest forms, that in the various results are to be found notable embodiments of our highest values, and that these embodied values tend more and more to become a harmonious system in which the various values are mutually furthered. Where this is shown a cosmic trend upward is established, such as corroborates the religious intuition and experience of a Cosmic Mind working to create and conserve value.

It is important at this point to note certain traits of the idea of God to which this interpretation of the results of science leads, if the interpretation is to have its full positive force. The idea of God that the cosmic trend upward points to is that of a Spiritual Being immanent in the processes of nature and history and conditioned in his working, at any given point, by the stages already reached in these processes; and at the same time that of a Being transcending the processes in which he is working, inasmuch as he is directing them to comprehensive values and knows the conditions which must be controlled, if the values are to be achieved, and the methods

of control adequate for the task. Now if the necessity of process for the realization of values, and the consequent fact of limiting conditions for God, are accepted frankly, the evidence for his transcendent qualities which can be derived from the synthesis of the sciences is correspondingly strengthened. For on this basis relapses, stagnations, and evils are not disproofs of God, but rather indications of the magnitude of the task of creating values and of the consequent unlikelihood that there would have been any progress at all without a cosmic God. For without a God possessing the transcendent qualities man's efforts for progress would be like the favorable variations in animal organs, which are recognized to be of no value at all apart from a fundamental will to live in the organism as a whole.

But this idea of God as immanent in the processes of nature and history and working by subduing limiting conditions to his purposes is not essentially different from the idea of God in which we found organized religious experience culminating—God as a Cosmic Mind working to conserve and create value. Thus we find the synthesis of the sciences and of organized religious experience corroborating each other in respect to the rationality of believing in a real God. On the one hand there is a cosmic trend upward which is difficult to comprehend without recognizing the activity in it of a Cosmic Mind, and on the other hand are the organized religious intuitions and experiences bearing witness to the actual presence of such a Mind, working redemptively and creatively for the achievement of ever richer and more comprehensive values.

And this corroboration of religious intuitions and experiences of God by the facts of progress becomes all the more complete when we realize that these intuitions and experiences, as they become harmoniously organized, have played a powerful constructive part in producing progress in its more advanced stages. That is to say, progress has come about not only because men have been intellectually inventive and socially

co-operative, but also because they have been conscious of living with God.

III

In conclusion I must touch briefly on a third point. We have found religious experience to be best interpreted as involving communion and co-operation with a Cosmic Mind that is working to conserve and create value. And we have found this interpretation corroborated by the synthesis of the sciences, which reveals progress on a cosmic scale. But the question is bound to arise: How may we more fully conceive the relation between the Cosmic Mind and the cosmos itself? We have found that in recognizing the Cosmic Mind as the ground of progress we also have been impelled to recognize that progress implies a series of conditions which at any given point are limitations for the Cosmic Mind. How extensive are these limiting conditions?

This, indeed, is a highly speculative question, and at first thought it may seem too remote from man's religious experience as a worker with God for his Kingdom to require consideration. But it is remotely speculative only in so far as it asks for an elaborated theory of the way in which the Cosmic Mind is related to the forces of nature. On the other hand it is practical when the questioning takes the following forms: If there are limiting conditions for God, is he not finite—indeed so finite that the triumph of his purposes is doubtful? If the human race, in spite of all the achievements that it may yet make, is liable to become extinct on this earth, why might not God himself cease to be—or become permanently hemmed in and checkmated by the universe?

It is, then, with reference to questions like these that the third point just referred to has its pertinency. It may be stated as follows: Progress in the biological and human realms is grounded in processes and conditions in the cosmos as a whole which are best understood as the product of a Cosmic Mind.

Broadly speaking, this grounding of progress in the cosmos as a whole has two main aspects. In the first place physical science shows that uniform laws run throughout the realm of physical nature, and without these uniform laws it is not possible to conceive progress as taking place at all. But a unified system of laws, which is inclusive of all existence in its physical aspects, is a worthy product of a Cosmic Mind. And this is the more evident when the system of laws proves to be the basis of progress on a great scale. Nor need it be maintained that the correlation between the system of laws and the realization of progress must be complete in order to give this point effect. It is enough if there is a process of correlation going on. A part of the outworkings of the system of physical laws may be merely mechanical—either unrelated to progress or hindering it—and yet a Cosmic Mind may reasonably be recognized in the whole, provided there is evidence that a great process of turning mechanism to account for ends of value has been, and is still, going on. For if the creation of value is fundamental to our conception of God, there is no reason why we should not think of him as now creating in the realm of the physical cosmos as well as in the realm of human society. Thus the system of uniform laws in physical nature may be thought of as the groundwork laid by a Cosmic Mind for the values already achieved in our experience and for a value-creating process that shall ultimately result in a spiritual universe.

The second aspect of the grounding of progress in the cosmos as a whole of which we are speaking is the fact that progress need not be thought of as beginning first with the organic world, but may be recognized as having its earlier stages in the inorganic. For prior to organisms we already have processes of organization which result in the building up of systems that maintain themselves over indefinitely great periods of time. As L. T. Hobhouse writes: The “process of development begins within the inanimate world.” Such

beginning he finds manifested in certain mechanical "structures." "The solar system," he says, "is such a structure," and he adds, "It would appear that the chemical atom is such a structure, its elements being the corpuscles, and the binding force the electrical attractions and repulsions that constrain corpuscles to assume certain alternative mutual relations"; and further, "atoms brought within the sphere of mutual influence can modify one another, and form higher structures, which are the molecules of the chemical compounds."¹

Now in this building up of stable organizations capable of maintaining themselves indefinitely we again have a process fit to be a manifestation of mind. And still more appropriate as manifestations of mind are the processes just referred to in which these stable organizations are modified in such a way as to produce higher organizations. When, then, we find a continuity of such organization processes, leading up to and conditioning organic development, we gain corroboration from the mechanical realm for the faith in a Cosmic Mind. Moreover, all the reality we know bears the marks of some organization, and the process of organization is actual or potential everywhere. Hence there is reason to think that there is no reality beyond the scope of the Cosmic Mind.

This interpretation leads to the view that God is infinite, if the term infinite is used in the sense in which alone ethical religion is concerned about it. That is, we are led by this view to conceive of God as infinite—not indeed as an Unconditioned Being, who determines all that is and happens according to his inscrutable nature—but as a Power pervading all reality with the value-creating process, and so inspiring faith in the ultimate spiritualization of the universe.

We find, then, when we attempt a synthesis of the sciences that treat of matter and mechanism with the sciences that treat of life and history, that the idea of a Cosmic Mind working under limiting conditions for the creation and conservation of

¹ *Development and Purpose*, p. 357.

value gets real corroboration. I have not desired to maintain that the conception of the merely mechanical and astronomical aspects of the universe here presented is the absolutely necessary result of science, nor that it is the only possible synthesis that can be made. I only urge that it is the more rational conception when one starts from religious experience, and that religious experience gains confirmation in the fact that these parts of the universe can rationally be so interpreted.

The merely mechanical and astronomical view of the universe is like a winter landscape. It gives us all the objects that there are. But the synthesis of this view and that of the biological and human sciences gives us a conception that is like the landscape in springtime. It shows the universe infused with the same kind of life that is pressing for fulfilment in man. A fuller view of the mechanical and astronomical universe may have to await a time when we walk not by faith but by sight.